To: Chairwoman Downey and the Members of the Assembly Human Services Committee  
From: Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers  
Re: Testimony on New Jersey’s Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) System  
Date: May 10, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers (Camden Coalition) on New Jersey’s Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) System. The Camden Coalition is a coalition of diverse healthcare stakeholders committed to local, community-based and data-driven innovation to improve quality and access to the healthcare delivery system. Our focus is on people experiencing complex health and social needs, the 10 percent of individuals in New Jersey on Medicaid who account for about 75 percent of expenditures. For our patients, unreliable transportation is a major hurdle to accessing the requisite care. We submit this testimony based on our experiences with NEMT as a nonprofit organization providing care coordination services to individuals with complex care needs and working towards healthcare delivery improvements.

Non-Emergency Medical Transportation in New Jersey.

Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) is a required Medicaid service that provides transportation to health care appointments for Medicaid beneficiaries. Evidence shows that access to reliable and quality transportation improves health outcomes and reduces the use of emergency services and costs. Unreliable transportation is a significant barrier to accessing basic healthcare for many Medicaid beneficiaries, and even more detrimental for those with complex health and social needs. Annually, about 3.6 million Medicaid beneficiaries miss or are forced to delay a medical appointment due to transportation issues.

NEMT is a cost-saver for Medicaid. Though it represents less than one percent of total Medicaid expenditures, it is estimated that the misuse of emergency services that would result from a lack of NEMT would cost the system 15 times more than the cost of routine transportation. Missed healthcare appointments, due to poor NEMT services, also lead to financial loss for providers through no-show rates.

Historically, New Jersey relied on local and county providers to operate NEMT benefits for Medicaid patients that were paid on a fee-for-service basis. In 2009, the state hired a third-party broker, LogistiCare, to provide NEMT across New Jersey. LogistiCare is an Atlanta-based NEMT company and operates in over 40 states. LogistiCare originally signed a five-year, $165 million contract with NJ Medicaid that was scheduled to end in 2014, but this contract has been extended seven times. In July 2017, LogistiCare was awarded a new long-term NEMT contract. Under its contractual obligations, LogistiCare arranges rides with local vendors across New Jersey, runs background checks on drivers, and is the one call center to coordinate rides for all 1.5 million New Jersey Medicaid beneficiaries.

LogistiCare’s past performance has hurt patients.

Over its 9-year tenure of providing NEMT service in New Jersey, LogistiCare has been excoriated for inadequate service by patients, providers, and advocates across the state. In Camden, some of the complaints include:
• Rides arrive late;
• Rides severely delayed, up to five hours;
• Pick-ups so late that health care appointments are subsequently canceled;
• Patients are abandoned at the doctor’s office;
• Poor driving and safety concerns;
• Sexual harassment;
• Rude treatment;
• Inappropriate vehicles for certain medical conditions;
• Elderly and disabled patients walking multiples miles to appointments as their NEMT rides never arrive.

The story of our patient, Mr. Jones, demonstrates the human and financial impact of ineffective NEMT. Mr. Jones relied on LogistiCare as his primary means of transportation to his doctors’ appointments. He did not want to burden his daughter who had young children and a busy work schedule. Mr. Jones always followed LogistiCare’s instructions for how to schedule a ride. On a hot, 88 degree, Tuesday, Mr. Jones waited for LogistiCare in the waiting room of his doctor’s office. When the office closed at 5pm, and LogistiCare still had not arrived, Mr. Jones was forced to wait for his ride in the heat. Mr. Jones tried to call his daughter to pick him up, but she was unavailable. Eager to get home, Mr. Jones decided he would try to walk. Unfortunately half way into his walk he began to have an asthma attack and had to call an ambulance to take him to the emergency room.

A federal audit of the New Jersey NEMT program validated the complaints compiled by patients, providers, and advocates across the state. In July 2016, the Office of the Inspector General released a report on the New Jersey Medicaid NEMT program and concluded the state did not adequately oversee the program.

*The Camden Coalition has been a leader in pushing for NEMT reform.*

Beginning in 2014, the Camden Coalition worked with Faith in New Jersey and the Good Care Collaborative (GCC) to improve NEMT services in New Jersey. The GCC is convened by the Camden Coalition and represents a diverse set of stakeholders in the healthcare system, including large hospital systems, patients and advocates, primary care and behavioral health providers, and faith-based communities. The GCC is committed to actively engaging diverse perspectives from across the healthcare spectrum in a dialogue about how to improve quality and decrease costs of services for vulnerable Medicaid patients. Improving NEMT is one of the GCCs priorities.

As part of its NEMT work, the GCC convened patients and providers to work with the State to identify issues with LogistiCare. Generally, patients’ and providers’ experiences with NEMT were negative, citing very long wait times, poor customer service, and inflexibility as serious barriers to patients being able to effectively use the benefit. Stakeholders also identified no-shows by the vendor (failure to pick up patients) and inappropriate driver behavior, such as disrespect and distracted driving, as issues. As part of this process, the Camden Coalition also conducted an analysis of state NEMT data that was ultimately presented to the New Jersey Medicaid office.

When the State released a Draft Request for Proposals (RFP) in July 2014 for public comment, the Camden Coalition and its partners were able to organize and coordinate public comments and submitted a robust recommendation on the contract, identifying the need for public engagement and accountability, time
benchmarks, GPS tracking, driver requirements and training, liquidated damages for missed performance benchmarks, and preferred providers. Because of the State’s willingness to partner with advocates to improve NEMT service, the final RFP, released in November 2015, incorporated four of the advocates recommendations including: GPS tracking and data capture systems in 90 percent of the contractor’s vehicles, documenting and resolving patient complaints in a standardized and robust manner, lowering ‘will call’ wait time from 90 to 60 minutes, and contacting ride beneficiaries a day ahead of time to confirm pickup time and location.

While the new LogistiCare contract has the potential to generate improvements to the NEMT system, patients and providers are still experiencing similar issues that need to be resolved.

**Issues have not been resolved under the new contract but there is improvement.**

Despite a few bright spots of improvement under the new LogistiCare contract, the majority of our patients are experiencing the same dangerously poor service as they were prior to the new long term contract. One particularly disturbing anecdote involved a driver telling a patient to preemptively sign the log certifying both legs of the trip when he was dropped at his provider, and then the driver never came back to bring him home. This is not an isolated incident and the larger community is aware of the problem. When our care team interviews patients at bedside in the hospital, it is not uncommon for the patient to display frustration with LogistiCare.

That said, the Camden Coalition care team has noticed some improvements in the last few months. New sub-contractors and isolated rides have provided on-time service. The vast majority of the service in Camden, however, remains a pain point for both the patients and providers who rely on it. LogistiCare’s level of no-shows and missed appointments is well known among Camden residents, and around the state.

The poor performance of NEMT is illustrated by the story of Freddy Rodriguez. Freddy is a cab driver in Camden who, for the last five years, has filled in the transportation gap our patients experience when the NEMT system breaks down. Our patients have experienced such poor service from LogistiCare that we often use cabs for those of our patients for whom such a vehicle will work. Thankfully, we found Freddy. Our care team often calls on him last minute when NEMT rides fail to show up or are abruptly canceled. His attentiveness and kindness, responsiveness and prompt service are a shining example of what NEMT service could and should be. The duplication of service that our need for Freddy underscores shows how the NEMT system in New Jersey is failing patients, providers and taxpayers alike. At the Camden Coalition we budget over $10,000 a year for taxi rides for our patients to get to medical appointments because we know that LogistiCare is unreliable. We have not changed our budgeting based on the new contract.

New Jersey needs to be a leader in fixing this lingering nationwide issue. The Camden Coalition is a member of a national coalition of NEMT advocates led by Community Catalyst. We regularly hear from sister organizations around the nation about poor NEMT and broker/provider performance. These issues are not unique to New Jersey. The prevalence of NEMT issues in other states means that it is even more important for New Jersey to ensure Medicaid NEMT is meeting the needs of its beneficiaries.

While New Jersey must continue to fight for improvements in NEMT, it must also must protect against attacks from Congress and the Federal Administration, who have signaled a desire to repeal NEMT as a required benefit of Medicaid. New Jersey has a vested interest in maintaining NEMT as a required
Medicaid benefit and in ensuring the effective implementation of the program. NEMT is essential to providing care to New Jersey’s most vulnerable residents. Attending regularly scheduled doctors’ appointments improves health outcomes and reduces unnecessary and avoidable emergency department costs.

Ultimately, NEMT is an essential services, especially for some of our most vulnerable residents in New Jersey. The failure to provide good transportation service is not only costing the state millions of dollars, but also jeopardizing the health and lives of patients.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We look forward to continuing to work with the state to help make New Jersey a model for NEMT that truly serves Medicaid patients. Please do not hesitate to contact us for more information.

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